



A senior delegation from the Ulster Farmers' Union will attend Monday's meeting of the AERA Committee to support them in seeking clear answers from DAERA officials following the enforcement operation near Fivemiletown.

A UFU delegation attending on behalf of its membership to seek clear answers, challenge the decisions taken and ensure the voice of Northern Ireland's farming community is heard at the highest level.

See questions:

INDEPENDENT REVIEW

Confidence in the DAERA veterinary division has collapsed amongst the farming community. It is of the utmost importance that this is restored urgently. This type of enforcement operation should be suspended while the review is ongoing. The independent review should be completed by a number of individuals with expertise. A Memorandum of Understanding between the UFU and the Department should be established to deal with enforcement operations going forward. It should be completed in time for the return of the NI Assembly. If wrongdoing has been committed by DAERA officials, these individuals should face the same legal consequences as all others who commit animal welfare offences.

- 1) Has this type of enforcement operation been suspended while the review is ongoing?
- 2) If the review finds any wrongdoing to have been committed by his officials, will the Minister give an assurance that the appropriate action will be taken, which may include dismissals?
- 3) Will consideration be given to appointing an expert panel to assist the review which could include individuals with legal expertise which come from outside the veterinary industry as well as suitably qualified individuals?
- 4) Will this review take into account not only this enforcement operation but the process by which the Department carries out all enforcement operations?
- 5) Will this review be completed in time for the NI Assembly returning from summer recess?

CONTEXT

This event has caused severe distress among the farming community and the wider public. It is essential that the AERA Committee establish the facts in the context to the Fivemiletown enforcement operation, including the statuses of the animals, handling facilities, animal temperament (which is reported to be extremely quiet) and decisions taken by officials.

- 1) Please provide a detailed chronology of events following the court order being issued up to and until the cattle were shot?
- 2) Did DAERA have an implementation plan in place for the day enforcement action was taken and what did that plan outline? What position does the person hold who gave the order to execute the event in the way it unfolded?
- 3) When were the animals last TB tested, how was this carried out and what was the temperament and condition of the animals? Were there cattle handling facilities in place and are the same facilities still at the property?
- 4) What inquiries did DAERA make with the farmer from the court order until the day of the event?
- 5) Was there a risk assessment carried out for both the farmer and the public involved?
- 6) Did Minister Muir, the Permanent Secretary and Chief Veterinary Officer have any prior knowledge, input or issue any orders to DAERA personnel from the court order and on the day the event took place?

COURT ORDER

It is important to establish what the court order actually said, how the animals were to be removed from the herd and how much input DAERA had into carrying out the operation as they did. Urgent clarity is needed around reports of some of the herd being sold and the rest being shot.

- 1) It is our understanding that a court order was made in respect of this farm, what was the exact wording of the court order, and was it accurately followed? Please could you provide a copy of this court order and confirm whether the requirements of the court order were complied with in full?
- 2) What did the order specifically say? Was there a destruction order, and if so, did DAERA have discretion as to how the animals were to be removed from the herd? Is the method of euthanasia standard practice when a deprivation or destruction order is granted?
- 3) The court issued a lifetime ban, however, it is being reported by sources close to events that a number of animals were sold to another herd owner. Can DAERA confirm this? If this was the case, why were the remainder of the animals shot and not allowed to be sold to another herd owner?

THE EVENT

It is important that the public receive a detailed chronology of events on the day the incident took place. Clarification is needed on the planning and execution of the operation, including a full timeline of events, the farmer's involvement, the handling of the animals, whether the force used was proportionate, the extent of PSNI involvement, the use of body-worn cameras, animal welfare considerations during the incident, and the arrangements for the removal of carcasses.

- 1) Please provide a detailed chronology of events on the day.
- 2) Was the farmer present at the location the animals were shot and were they co-operative?
- 3) Were there any handling facilities at the property? Were the animals shot in one location?
- 4) Was the incident excessive? Were silencers used on the guns?
- 5) What, if any, involvement did the PSNI have in relation to the incident. Please provide details of the extent of the PSNI involvement including the stage at which they were first involved. If the PSNI had no involvement, please explain the reasons for their non-involvement.
- 6) Were the enforcement team wearing body cameras at any point?
- 7) When the shooting began, how did the animals react? Can every shot fired be accounted for?
- 8) Did any of the herd flee the scene on the day?
- 9) What plan was in place to deal with the carcasses of the animals on the day? Was there any carcass removal transportation arranged as part of the operation on the day?